3: Mackenzie M-5 (ca. 1925) 1925
FN17 Ngonde FN17

# The Spirit-Ridden Konde

## CHAPTER I

## The Land & the People

UNGONDE, as the Konde people call their country, lies around the north end of Lake Nyasa. Northwards of that point it stretches for about fifty miles, and southwards for roughly the same distance. Like all their neighbours, the Konde belong to the great Bantu race, which occupies Africa from the Cape to the Congo, and beyond.

The lake shore plain is narrow, fertile, and populous, with its centre at Karonga, where there is a British Magistrate, some trading stores, and a station of the Livingstonia Mission of the United Free Church of Scotland. Beyond the plain the tribe, under various local names, reaches up into the mountains on both sides of the lake. Outside of Nyasaland, and northwards across the Songwe, it covers a large area in what was once German East Africa, but is now known as Tanganyika Territory. Here, too, the plain is hot, fertile, and populous as at Karonga. Northwards of the plain lie the healthy uplands of Mwamba and

9: Wilson E-5 (1934-1955) 1959
FN17 Ngonde FN17
Nyakyusa
Kinga FN12

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTORY

THE peoples with whom this book is concerned, the Nyakyusa and the Ngonde, occupy an area shut in by mountains at the northern end of Lake Nyasa, and enjoy a culture which, though varying locally, clearly springs from a common basis and is traditionally attributed to similar origins. The most conspicuous features of their political organization are (i) the balance of power between chiefs and commoners; (ii) the 'coming out' ritual in which a generation of men which has governed for approximately thirty years retires and hands over the administration to its sons, retaining only ritual functions; and (iii) the system of age-villages.

All are agreed that chiefs and commoners belong to different stocks; the commoners being descended from the original occupants of the country while the chiefs trace their descent to a line of invaders who came down from the Livingstone mountains eight generations ago. According to the myth, they brought with them fire, and cattle, and iron tools, and they found a people who ate their food raw in a land 'without trees'.[1] Commoners are *abatitu*, black people, while Ngulube, an early ancestor of the chiefs, was 'pale'[2] and chiefs (*abanyafyale*) generally are said to have been lighter in colour and 'different in their bodies'. After generations of intermarriage between chiefs and commoners there is no consistent difference in physical type between them, but the range of physical type among the Nyakyusa as a whole is wide.[3]

Nyakyusa and Ngonde historians say that their chiefs are related to those of the Kinga, who live high above the Nyakyusa valley to the east in the Livingstone mountains, whence the chiefs came. The Kinga acknowledge the connexion and join with the Nyakyusa in sacrifice to their common heroes, but culturally the

[1] Possibly the lake-shore plain. The hills until cultivated are covered with either savannah or rain forest.

[2] Godfrey Wilson, *The Constitution of Ngonde*, Rhodes-Livingstone Papers No. 3, p. 10 (1939). According to the Ngonde version Ngulube was the *first* ancestor.

[3] cf. F. Fülleborn, *Beiträge zur physischen Anthropologie der Nord-Nyassander* (1902). *Das Deutsche Njassa- und Ruwuma-Gebiet Atlas* (1906).

N 101 131 [184] N 642 N 173 N [167] N [569] N 144 N 173 N K 171 [648] [113]